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FOREIGN DEPARTMENT



IN CHARGE OF
LAVINIA L. DOCK

SAINT RADEGONDE, QUEEN OF FRANCE

IN the act of looking up the histories of dead and gone people who have done worthy deeds one becomes quite attached to the figures whose lives one is searching into, and so, having pored over many tomes to learn something of Radegonde, a one-time queen of France who was a famous nurse in the Sixth Century, she seemed so real to me and I felt so deeply interested in her that when I got into France nothing would have kept me from getting to Poitiers where she lived a long time and founded her great convent of noble ladies.

The ancient town of Poitiers is full of interest and charm for persons of many diverse interests. Those who love the Picts, the Romans, the Merovingians can find them all here, piled one on top of the other. The cellars of houses are full of old walls, remnants of subterranean passages, caves where French dragons once lived in Roman diggings, and all sorts of such relics. Above ground, sad to say, most of the beautiful and picturesque fifteenth century houses have been pulled down and the actual present main streets show little of the architecture of the past, but in the side streets and out-of-the way alleys and winding ways there is a great treasure of interesting corners, picturesque old gardens, and general old-timeyness, though one is conscious of a certain squalor which is not entirely definable. People who understand architecture find the old churches here extremely fascinating and remarkable, and even a tyro can see that they are so. But, after all, Radegonde is the most interesting relic of Poitiers,—alone well worth a visit, though the beauty of the old town's situation and environment is not to be forgotten.

Radegonde was a German princess of Thuringia, born a heathen, who, at the age of twelve years, having seen all her elders and relations murdered and their lands stolen in the good old-fashioned way, was taken a captive into France, in the year 529 A.D. King Clotaire, though a detestable person, still has this to his credit, that, intending to marry the little princess when she grew older, he provided masters for her who gave her a very admirable and extensive education. Radegonde

learned Latin and Greek, was converted to Christianity, and developed a high and queen-like character. The legends say that she abhorred the thought of marrying Clotaire and tried to escape when the time came. The country people cherish the story of a cave where she hid, and where a miraculous spring appeared; of a rockbed that became soft as Clotaire's horse galloped over it when he was pursuing her, so that the horse's hoofs sank in, when it immediately hardened again, and like tales. Nevertheless, she had to marry him, and again we must give him this credit, that he endowed her liberally with lands and wealth. But he was brutal, greedy, and unintellectual. Radegonde stifled in the atmosphere of his court, and to solace herself and employ her energies she built a hospice for poor and sick women on her estate at Athies, and spent most of her time in working there as a nurse, making beds, cleansing and dressing ulcers and wounds, bathing lepers, consoling the dying, and dressing the dead for burial. King Clotaire grew more and more unpleasant, and she finally left him altogether, and, as a protection against him, commanded one of the high priests of the church to consecrate her to religion. It was after this that she came to Poitiers and founded the extensive abbey of Sainte-Croix, built churches, established hospitals, trained two hundred religious sisters, and devoted herself to a life of humble service to the poor and the sick.

She came to Poitiers about 553 A.D. It was a proud day for the city when Queen Radegonde entered it with her noble train of followers, and to-day, even, it is full of memory of her, in the names of streets, church, and parts of the town. The extensive domain where she held sway is now built over, new streets run where the old convent walls stood, her own special church has been so often rebuilt and repaired that only a couple of the original stone carvings are left, but still the memory of Radegonde is fresh, green, and tenderly cherished because of her services to the miserable and afflicted.

Some remains of the ancient abbey and of the town of Radegonde's time existed up to a late day. Her own especial cell near the church, now called by her name (which she had built under the name of "St. Marie-beyond-the-Walls"), was only destroyed in 1795. The greater part of the domain had been sold in 1791, for the benefit of the state. As late as 1904, in filling up parts of the town that were built over old ruins, an ancient Roman subterranean passage was filled in which, according to the superstitions of Radegonde's age, was inhabited by a dragon who devoured any of the nuns that were rash enough to try to pass that way, and in 1905, the last remnants of an old Roman tower were cleared away, in which her companions and followers had stood

to watch her funeral procession go by, and from the little window of which they had thrown flowers upon her coffin. One relic there still is, which is said to date from her day—a large laurel tree, which she is said to have planted with her own hands. It measures three metres in circumference, and has been cut back many times. It stands in a garden on the rue Carolus. Some old houses, older than the fifteenth century, still stand in the quarter where her abbey was, and one of them contains a portion of old stone wall with a little window in it, through which Radegonde, it is said, used to give food to the poor. However, this old wall is now so covered with vines that not a stone can be seen—to the great annoyance of antiquarians.

It so happened that I got to Poitiers on St. Radegonde's fête day. The church was open, and around it the old women were selling wax candles and little casts of arms, legs, head, hand, foot, trunk, and heart, made of wax. To buy one or more of these (two cents each), and offer them up to Saint Radegonde would keep off sickness in that particular part of one's body. After buying a leg, an arm, a head, trunk and heart, the old ladies thoughtfully suggested that to buy a whole wax figure (which they supplied) would ensure me against sickness anywhere. I took their advice, and escorted by two enthusiasts, I deposited my little wax casts at the feet of the statue of Radegonde and mounted two lighted candles on her tomb. The black marble coffin is the same one in which she was buried. The carved stone table on which it now stands is from the eleventh century, as is also the present crypt of the church where it is placed. In 1562 the church was pillaged by the Huguenots, Radegonde's coffin was broken, and some of her bones were burned—not all; some were saved, encased in a box of lead, and replaced three years later with great pomp in the black marble coffin.

The statue of Radegonde in the church does not, unfortunately, show the features of the religious queen and nurse. It was made in the likeness of Anne of Austria who gave it to the church.

The public library of Poitiers contains a beautiful illuminated Life of Radegonde, by Fortunatus, a monk, and, I believe, also a Saint. I wanted much to see this treasure for its beautiful illustrations—the Latin text, alas, would have been beyond me; but unfortunately it was the month of August and the library was closed.

There is a special festival on the 13th of August in honor of Radegonde, when the leaves of the laurel tree are sold in little silk bags, and special cakes and buns of St. Radegonde are eaten.

There is still a small convent and a St. Radegonde Day Nursery

in the old quarter, but the sisters belong to another order and can claim no descent from the queenly ancestress of nursing sisters.

References: Sainte Radegonde, queen of France and patron saint of Poitou, by the Abbé Briaud, Paris, Poitiers, 1899. New Guide to Poitiers and History of its Streets from the First to the Twentieth Century, by R. Brothière de Rollière, member of the Commission of Neuilly, Paris, on municipal history, and of the Archæological Society of Paris. Poitiers, 1907. Vie de Sainte Radegonde, by M. de Fleury



A NEW AND EFFICIENT METHOD OF ROOM DISINFECTION.—Dr. McLaughlin, after describing two other methods of disinfecting rooms in common use, says, in the *Medical Record*: The “Stewart method” consists in thoroughly spraying the walls, furniture, and floor of the room with a 20 per cent. solution of formaldehyde gas, and then spraying the mattresses, laying one on top of the other, and then the pillows, bedding, etc. The most prominent exponent of this method is the Philadelphia Health Department. In the first two methods (the Maine and the Walker methods), penetration to any extent is not alleged, and it is the custom both of the Marine Hospital Service and of the New York Health Department to disinfect articles such as bedding, clothing, etc., in the steam autoclave. But in the Stewart method it is stated that the disinfection is sufficiently perfect to render steam sterilization in the autoclave unnecessary. Dr. McLaughlin found that if the gas formaldehyde is mixed with vapor of carbolic acid, the tendency to polymerization does not seem to exist, and that the formaldehyde penetrates as one would expect, *i.e.*, obeys the ordinary law of diffusion of gases. The mixture which he has used is 75 per cent. of a 40 per cent. solution of formaldehyde and 25 per cent. of carbolic acid. He uses eight ounces of this mixture to 1000 cubic feet of air space, and allows the room to remain closed twelve hours. He has used a retort to volatilize the mixture, but, as a matter of convenience, usually saturated a sheet and hung it up in the room to be disinfected (an ordinary sheet will hold about six ounces of the mixture). He was very successful with his tests.